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Assessment of Students

*E*ducation Code Section 51746(b) states that the services and resources for independent study may include:

The services of qualified personnel to assess the achievement, abilities, interests, aptitudes, and needs of participating pupils to determine each of the following:

(1) Whether full-time independent study is the most appropriate alternative for the pupil being referred.

(2) If the answer to paragraph (1) is affirmative, the determination of the most appropriate individualized plan and resources to be made available to pupils enrolled in full-time independent study.

Before appropriate placement can be made in independent study, the student's academic strengths and weaknesses need to be diagnosed. This assessment should give the independent study coordinator, counselor, or teacher specific information for planning the student's educational program. The assessment also might reduce the amount of time, energy, and frustration spent by students, parents, and school staffs in trying to find the best educational alternative for students. Assessments do not guarantee a proper fit, but do tend to eliminate much of the guesswork.

A Assessment Process

The initial assessment, especially for elementary students or students with low self-esteem or limited success in traditional classroom-based programs, should not be based on tests. The assessment

process might include an informal interview between the appropriate school staff and the student and parent. In another nonthreatening and quick assessment, the student might verbally answer a student profile questionnaire, such as the samples at the end of this chapter.

In a more formal assessment process, the designated assessment personnel or other staff members who are responsible for the initial assessment should be aware of the conditions for successful testing. The designated personnel should:

1. Be familiar with various assessment instruments.
2. Be able to choose appropriate instruments and correctly interpret the results.
3. Be genuinely empathetic toward all students and flexible in dealing with a wide variety of students.
4. Be sensitive to the fact that testing can be stressful and be willing to help students feel comfortable with the process.
5. Possess good listening and counseling skills.

A positive environment is another important condition to ensure valid assessment results. Consider the following factors in selecting the location for testing sessions:

• Adequate lighting
• Controlled temperature of the room
• Comfortable furniture
• Comfortable noise level in the room

In addition to physical factors, consider time constraints. Testing sessions should be separated by frequent breaks. Depending on the time of day and the length of the session, a refreshment break might also be appropriate.

B Factors to Consider in Assessment

It is important to contact district, county, or private assessment specialists who could assist the school in determining factors to identify a potentially successful candidate for independent study. This chapter indicates possible assessment areas and some resources. However, the following factors are important to remember when selecting assessment instruments:

1. Test only the areas that are essential to placement.

2. Do not test just for the sake of testing, especially if current test information is available.
3. Select instruments based on the assessment personnel available and within time and budgetary constraints.

C Assessment of Students in Kindergarten Through Grade Eight

Initial student assessment in kindergarten through grade eight independent study varies. Students who transfer directly from another school often have records to indicate what books and materials need to be used. Refer to the appropriate curriculum frameworks and state documents for developing procedures to assess students' strengths and deficiencies in various subject areas.

Whatever assessment format the school uses, it is important that completion of the assessment results in a placement that is comfortable and successful for the student.

D Assessment of Students in Grades Nine Through Twelve

1. Initial student assessment in grades nine through twelve is often more extensive than at other grade levels as it is necessary to include vocational assessment activities as well as an analysis of the coursework and skills necessary for high school completion.

The following activities could enhance the enrollment process:

• Intake interview
• Review of records (grades, achievement testing, attendance, previous interest inventory results)
• Transcript analysis/credit check (See Chapter 8, "Attendance Accounting and the Audit Trail," for sample forms.)
• Basic skills screening tests (reading and mathematics)
• Writing sample
• Vocational interviews and counseling
• Vocational interest inventories

- Multiaptitude test batteries (if appropriate)
- Vision, hearing, motor skills (Contact appropriate district, county, or private specialists, or local public health clinics.)

2. Assessment instruments:

   a. *Basic skills screening tests* (academic achievement). These tests are used to identify an individual's proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics. Some tests of basic skills can be used to diagnose specific deficiencies so that instruction can be linked appropriately to the assessment. Some of these tests can also be used as pretests and posttests for the purpose of monitoring the progress of students.

   b. *Vocational interest inventories.* Interest assessments are used in guidance programs to explore students' preferences for certain kinds of work. These assessments create a better understanding of the personal and environmental influences involved in career selection.

   c. *Multiaptitude test batteries.* Aptitude is a combination of abilities and other characteristics, either inherent or acquired. A student's aptitudes indicate the individual's ability to learn or develop proficiency in some particular area. The tests measure special abilities or assess readiness for learning in specific vocational clusters. Manual dexterity and tests for color blindness also fall within this category.

   d. *Work samples.* A simulated work or job sample is a collection of job tasks that allow persons to use the actual tools and procedures of a particular occupation. Students interacting with simulated work samples actively explore, evaluate, and learn more about themselves in relation to the work activities of a specific occupation.

   e. *Preemployment and work maturity.* These assessments focus on the attitude and basic work knowledge necessary for getting and keeping a job. Behavioral checklists and learning-style indicators are in this category. The following are resources for these kinds of assessments. Specific instruments are suggested resources only and *not* recommendations.

   f. *Learning styles*
      - Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
      - Kiersey-Bates Temperament Sorter (must be duplicated from book)

        Please Understand Me by David Kiersey and Marilyn Bates

        INI Books
        2153 DeMayo Road
        Del Mar, CA 92014
        (619) 481-0576

      - Swassing-Barbe Modality Index

        Zaner-Bloser
        P.O. Box 16764
        Columbus, OH 43216-6764
        (614) 486-0221

3. Resources for test selection

   - CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) Vocational Assessment Guide for Youth and Adults, 1988

     CASAS
     2725 Congress Street
     San Diego, CA 92110

     This guide has been written as a reference to aid in the selection of published assessment instruments which are appropriate for varied youth and adult populations. The instruments reviewed include interest inventories, aptitude/ability and preemployment/work maturity assessments, and work samples.

E Role of the Counselor or Placement Person

The counselor or placement person should conduct a personal interview with the student and parent, guardian, or caregiver, when appropriate, based on formal and informal assessments. During this interview, the counselor could discuss the following:

1. Assessment results, relayed in a positive manner, and the implications for educational planning

2. Educational status review; for example, placement levels for students in kindergarten through grade eight, or transcript evaluation for high school students

3. Various alternative approaches available to the student

4. The most appropriate educational plan for the student

5. Referral to programs other than independent study; for example, special educational services, alternative regular education elementary offerings, Regional Occupational Centers/Programs (ROC/P), Adult Education, JTPA, GAIN, GED testing centers, and community colleges

6. Referrals to social service agencies; for example, substance abuse centers, social welfare agencies, and mental health centers

7. Expectations of the student's responsibilities for independent study

If the counselor or placement person determines through this assessment and counseling process that independent study is the appropriate educational placement, the next step would be to schedule the student with a teacher or teachers. If possible, the student should be placed with a teacher whose style best fits the student's needs. For example, a young male student with no adult male role model might benefit from having a male teacher. An introverted student with low self-esteem might benefit from having a warm, caring teacher who has the ability to enhance the student's self-esteem.

F Ongoing Assessment

Once the initial placement has been made, it is advisable to maintain an ongoing assessment process. See the curriculum chapter, Chapter 11, for additional strategies to make the student assessment process more meaningful. The following chart illustrates activities that can help to ensure a student's continued success in independent study.

Student Assessment Process

Participation in a student assessment process could be a requirement for enrollment and is essential to ensure that student needs are met. The following participation could be required in a small or large (15 maximum) group setting:

Day 1, Three Hours

 • Registration process with parent attendance required
 • Orientation explaining educational program, Regional Occupational Program, and work experience
 • Administration of reading test as needed
 • Explanation of orientation assignments (See Chapter 6 for suggestions.)

School Personnel: Administrator, ROP/OWE Coordinator, Counselor, Classified

Day 2, Three Hours

 • Administration of ability and career inventory
 • Goal setting

School Personnel: Counselor

Day 3, Three Hours

 • Administration of math placement test
 • Presentation of units on dealing with life changes
 • Administration of reading test as needed
 • Exploration of personality as it relates to relationships, study habits, and career placement

School Personnel: Counselor

Day 4, Three Hours

 • Completion and review of orientation assignment
 • Completion of an individual profile, including ability and career inventory analysis, personality type, reading and math scores, writing sample, goals, analysis of credits earned, and resources for stress or crisis (The academic assignment is given. Parents are welcome to attend the first hour for the explanation of the profiles. See sample High School Student Profile at end of chapter.)

School Personnel: Counselor, Teacher

Schools with limited resources could modify the above process to meet student needs.